Crook Co. sheriff defends stand on new gun laws

Deschutes Sheriff Blanton, others weigh in

By Barney Lerten
Kim Tobin

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Crook Co. Sheriff won't enforce new gun laws

PRINEVILLE, Ore. - Crook County Sheriff Jim Hensley explained his decision Wednesday to write a letter to Vice President Joe Biden, saying he and his deputies won't enforce any new gun laws or regulations passed by President Obama or Congress that he believes are unconstitutional.

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"I'm going to follow my oath that I took as Sheriff to support the constitution," Hensley said.

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Hensley took the offer from his Linn County counterpart and fired off a blistering letter Tuesday to Vice President Joe Biden.

Linn County Sheriff Tim Mueller sent the vice president such a letter Monday, accusing politicians of “attempting to exploit the deaths of innocent victims by advocating for laws that would prevent honest, law abiding Americans from possessing certain firearms and ammunition magazines.”

"Banning firearms and magazines, that is not going to cure the problem," Hensley said.

Many of the comments on KTVZ.COM back Hensley. But others agree with Lauretta Butler of Redmond, who says the sheriff is not above the law.

"He took an oath to protect and to serve," Butler said. "That doesn't mean you can pick and choose what you want to uphold. That means if it becomes a law, you have to uphold that law."

Deschutes County Sheriff Larry Blanton said he agrees with what the other sheriffs are telling Biden about refusing to enforce regulations that infringe on Second Amendment rights, but he added this caveat: "unless otherwise ordered to do so."

"Right now, I support the Constitution and I support the Second Amendment," Blanton said. "I support our citizens and other citizens rights to own and bear arms. That's my stand. Always has been, always will be."

State Sen. Ginny Burdick, D-Portland, is working on a bill to ban or limit assault style rifles, and limit magazines to no more than 10 rounds.

"If we have a five-shot limit for hunting big game, why on earth would we want to have a 100 round magazines on our streets?" Burdick asked. "The only purpose of these guns is to kill people."

In his letter, Mueller wrote, “We are Americans! We must not allow, nor shall we tolerate, the actions of criminals, no matter how heinous the crimes, to prompt politicians to enact laws that will infringe upon the liberties of responsible citizens who have broken no laws.

Mueller also circulated the letter to other Oregon sheriffs and suggested they could send a similar letter, if they agreed with him, according to Hensley, who did so on Tuesday, saying he “felt the same way” as the Linn County law enforcer.

“I said, you know what? It’s a clear statement. He hit the nail right on the head,” Hensley told KTVZ.COM Tuesday night.

Hensley’s letter, changed only by county name, stated: “Any federal regulation enacted by Congress or by executive order of the President offending the constitutional rights of my citizens shall not be enforced by me or by my deputies, nor will I permit the enforcement of any unconstitutional regulations or orders by federal officers within the borders of Crook County, Oregon.”

“In summary, it is the position of this Sheriff that I refuse to participate, or stand idly by, while my citizens are turned into criminals due to the unconstitutional actions of misguided politicians,” Hensley concluded.

Asked why he sent the letter, Hensley said Tuesday night, “I believe strongly in the Second Amendment.”

“If the federal government comes into Crook County and wants to take firearms and things away from (citizens), I’m going to tell them it’s not going that way,” the sheriff said.

But Hensley also says that despite all the talk, he doesn’t believe things will go that far, “because there’s so much opposition in this country” to more restrictions on gun ownership.

“Some people go so far as to ask, ‘Well, are you going to fight our military when they come to take our guns?’” Hensley said. “I say absolutely not – we’re not going to get into a gun battle with our fellow citizens. But I will do everything in my power to defend their right to the Second Amendment.”

Henley said in his view, “They are addressing the wrong topics,” and he points to violent video games as an example: “Kids for years now play video games in which they have committed thousands of homicides. I believe those games are teaching kids games they shouldn’t be doing, instilling a mindset to kill as many people as in a video game.”

“I’m not saying outlaw the games,” the sheriff said, but “if you’re going to look at firearms,” you should look at other factors that may also play a role in such mass shootings.

Hensley noted that there are already “hundreds of gun laws on the book. A responsible gun owner – a responsible person knows who they are selling a firearm to, or trading with. The bottom line is, I don’t even believe that people, in my opinion, should have to have a concealed weapons permit. There’s other states that don’t.”

Mueller says he took an oath to support the Constitution, and laws preventing citizens from owning certain semi-automatic firearms and ammunition magazines would violate their rights.

Though the letter might add fuel to an already hot topic, Mueller told The Associated Press he wishes people could have a civilized discussion about the issue, rather than resort to threats and name-calling.

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